

## Delaware Small Business Persons of the Year

**Barbara Hines**  
**Nancy Froome**  
**Nicholas Romano**  
**SSD Technology Partners**  
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It all started with two women entrepreneurs and a 12' x 10' foot office. When Barbara Hines and Nancy Froome started SSD in 1983, they were widely recognized as pioneers in the male-dominated software industry. Today, with a third partner, Nick Romano, they are known for their staying power in an industry that has experienced dramatic changes over the past 26 years.

Founded as Software Services of Delaware, Inc., the company now does business as SSD Technology Partners, a name that encompasses the spirit of how the three principals conduct business. Constantly adapting to the changing market demands of the technology sector, SSD held its ground over the years and grew into a \$5 million technology firm with 27 employees.

The company provides technology expertise to small and medium-sized businesses, non-profits and universities. SSD's services include consulting, programming, business continuity solutions, network architecture, management, and maintenance.

The company's long-term success is deeply rooted in its 26-year relationship with its bank, Wilmington Trust. In the first few years of operation, the partners reached out to Wilmington Trust for financing. Although the bank felt SSD had the products and services to meet the needs of a niche market, it knew it needed a sound business plan for strategic growth. At their banker's advice, the partners worked with SCORE-Counselors to America's Small Business, for guidance in managing the business and marketing their products. Through its early years, SSD relied heavily on the sound financial advice from SCORE and other mentors.

As SSD grew, its partnership with Wilmington Trust grew. In 1994, the bank financed a \$140,000 SBA 7(a) guaranteed loan to help SSD expand into new markets and offer new services to tech-savvy businesses.

Although programming was SSD's initial focus, Hines and Froome started offering helpdesk and hardware support to their clients. They hired Romano as a programmer right out of college. His expertise proved invaluable and in 1985, at the age of 21, he became vice president of research and development, completing the management team.

Success came early when the team developed an accounting package for a Delaware non-profit that was later adopted by more than 350 non-profits nationwide. Sales of this niche program contributed to increased profits and the need for additional employees. The company expanded and relocated several times over the years, and today occupies a 5500 square foot office with 27 employees.

### **Overcoming Adversity**

SSD overcame many challenges over the years. The dot.com industry collapse in the 1990s forced many of its clients to close or downsize. The business responded by restructuring its operations. The Y2K challenge forced it to discontinue a product that was a major source of revenue. The partners then turned to network integration which led to increased hardware sales.

In 1999, 75 percent of the SSD's revenue was from hardware sales; today it represents only 10 percent. Consumers no longer need complete systems like they did in 1999. This industry change hit SSD hard, forcing it to once again transform its services.

SSD's innovative software solutions contributed to its staying power. Its Messenger 911 program improves the emergency response time for volunteer fire companies throughout Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York City. SSD's Axiom software program was initially developed to help Villanova University improve its student record keeping. It is now used by colleges and universities nationwide.

Although these software programs were adopted across the country, SSD remained focused on its original mission, to provide small and medium sized businesses with technology solutions. The increased need for technical support services and maintenance in the past decade led the company to once again restructure and expand its services into Managed Services contracts.

### **Giving Back to the Community**

The three partners have made community service a major focus of the business. SSD's employees actively participate in programs that benefit local charities, including the Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition, Delaware Hospice, Wilmington Women in Business, Blood Bank of Delaware, and the Boys & Girls Club.

After the theft of two tractor trailers full of donated food, SSD and several of its vendors donated the hardware, software and installation of a high-tech video surveillance system valued at \$10,000 to the Food Bank of Delaware.

SSD's ability to adapt to constant market changes is a testament to its staying power. But it is its commitment to the highest level of customer service, as evidenced by its client retention rate of 98 percent in the past decade, that drives its success.

From the modest beginnings of a small 10' x 12' office, Barbara Hines, Nancy Froome and Nick Romano have overcome many obstacles to build SSD Technology Partners into a 26-year success story with clients from New York City to Alexandria, Va.